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C I R C U L A R

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The Protection of Short Lobsters in the Market Lobster Areas

D. G. Wilder

Wider spaces between trap laths would protect your livelihood by allowing most of the "shorts" to escape without reducing your catch of marketable lobsters.

Protect small lobsters to protect your livelihood.

Recent studies in the market-lobster areas have shown that lobsters just under the $3\frac{1}{8}$ " carapace size limit grow on the average $\frac{1}{2}$ " a year in carapace length (measured from eye socket to end of "body" shell). In addition, measurements of many thousands of lobsters have shown that in most of the market-lobster areas 75% by count of the legal-sized lobsters caught in any year were short lobsters the previous year. It is now clear that the success of the fishery in any year is largely dependent on the abundance of short lobsters the previous year and on the proportion of these which survives to enter the commercial fishery.

Narrow spaces between laths destroy and damage small lobsters.

The narrow-spaced traps now in general use catch millions of short lobsters every year. Even with careful handling many of these shorts die from exposure to wind and sunlight. Many of those which are promptly returned to the water suffer the loss of one or both claws and enter the fishery the following year as culls with one or both claws still missing, or at best with very small claws. These deaths and mutilations are largely unnecessary and represent a direct loss to the fishermen.

To reduce this unnecessary loss, fishermen are urged to widen the lath spaces of their traps and allow the shorts to escape alive and uninjured.

Tests with traps having wide spaces between the laths.

During the past few years tests have been made comparing traps having $1\frac{1}{4}$ " lath spaces with those having $1\frac{3}{4}$ " spaces. All of these tests were made under actual fishing conditions and were conducted with the help of experienced, successful lobster fishermen. The numbers of short and market lobsters caught in five of these experiments were as follows:

Port	Number of "shorts" caught		Number of "markets" caught	
	$1\frac{1}{4}$ " spaces	$1\frac{3}{4}$ " spaces	$1\frac{1}{4}$ " spaces	$1\frac{3}{4}$ " spaces
L'Archeveque, N. S.	597	196	510	509
Port Mouton, N. S.	284	46	165	176
Clarke's Harbor, N. S.	82	19	243	245
Port Maitland, N. S.	368	74	237	199
Grand Manan, N. B.	468	128	61	83
	1,799	463	1,216	1,212

These experiments show that $1\frac{3}{4}$ " spaces will permit about 75% of the short lobsters to escape without reducing the total catch of market lobsters. More recent experiments have been conducted in which carefully measured lobsters were placed in traps which had the fishing rings closed and the laths spaced at $1\frac{5}{8}$ " or $1\frac{3}{4}$ ". These experiments showed that the laths should not be spaced wider than $1\frac{5}{8}$ " as it is possible for a few of the smallest markets to escape through $1\frac{3}{4}$ " spaces.

Other advantages of wide-spaced traps.

As well as permitting most of the short lobsters to escape, the wide-spaced traps catch fewer crabs, "snails", etc., and fewer lobsters are injured by jamming their claws between the laths. Old traps can be readily altered by widening the lowest side space which is sufficient to permit the shorts to escape. Laths can be saved by building new traps with wide spaces throughout. This gives a lighter trap which requires less ballast and is easier to haul.

